

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A system to detect and reward the return of shopping carts to collection points at a shopping center, comprising: at least one collection point (1) for receiving and storing shopping carts and a detection means (5, 6, 8, 10) to generate a signal for issuance of a bonus when a shopping cart (3) is returned to the at least one collection point (1), ~~wherein,~~

the detection means (5, 6, 8, 10) determines whether the returned shopping cart (3) has been stored in a stacked row of shopping carts (2) within a prescribed tolerance by determining if a handlebar of the shopping cart is within the prescribed tolerance to a handlebar of a next adjacent shopping cart.

2. (currently amended) A system according to claim 1, wherein the detection means include a digital image-processing camera located above the stacked row (2) of shopping carts stored in the at least one collection point (1) and is programmed to recognize the handlebar of the shopping cart (3) as well as a distance and/or a parallel positioning to the handlebar of the next adjacent shopping cart.

3. (canceled)

4. (previously presented) A system according to claim 2, wherein the camera is located so that it only detects the shopping carts (3) that are put away inside of the at least one collection point (1).

5. (previously presented) A system according to claim 1, wherein said shopping cart (3) is provided with an optically determinable individual identification.

6. (previously presented) A system according to claim 1, wherein the at least one collection point (1) is provided with an optical signal transmitter (5) that operates in an IR range.

7. (previously presented) A system according to claim 6, wherein the shopping carts (3) are provided with deflection units (11, 12) to deflect a light signal (6) from the signal transmitter (5) directing the light signal (6) from one shopping cart (3) to a next immediate shopping cart (3) in the stacked row of shopping carts (2).

8. (previously presented) A system according to claim 6, wherein the detection means include evaluation units (8) attached to the shopping carts (3) which generate a signal to issue a bonus upon receiving a light signal (13) that was received and redirected by the shopping cart (3) in front of them in the stacked row of shopping carts (2).

9. (previously presented) A system according to claim 8, wherein the evaluation units (8) are designed such that they convey the signal (13) to issue the bonus to a customer-held data medium.

10. (previously presented) A system according to claim 9, wherein the evaluation units (8) are provided with a read-write device (9) with which the signal (13) to issue the bonus can be stored on a customer card (10).

11. (previously presented) A system according to claim 6, characterized in that the optical signal transmitter (5) is made up of a common lighting system with a modulated light signal (6).

12. (currently amended) A method to detect and reward the return of shopping carts to collection points at a shopping center, comprising: generating a signal upon the return of a shopping cart to a collection point to issue a bonus, wherein the bonus is issued only if the returned shopping cart is stored in a shopping cart stacked row in the collection point within a prescribed tolerance by determining if a handlebar of the shopping cart is within the prescribed tolerance to a handlebar of a next adjacent shopping cart.

13. (previously presented) A method according to claim 12, further comprising using a digital image-processing camera to generate the signal to issue a bonus.

14. (previously presented) A method according to claim 12, further comprising attaching an optically recognizable individualized identification to the shopping carts.

15. (previously presented) A method according to claim 12, further comprising initiating the generation of the signal to issue the bonus using an optical signal at the collection point.

16. (original) A method according to claim 15, further comprising modulating the optical signal according to a common lighting system at the collection point.

17. (previously presented) A method according to claim 12, wherein the signal to issue a bonus is stored on a data medium of the customer.